



15 December 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Possible Asbestos Health Hazard in Agency Office Buildings

1. A December 10 Washington Post story (attached) cited a study by New York City's Mt. Sinai School of Medicine pertaining to potential health hazards from asbestos fibers in office buildings. The author of the study is quoted:

"We are seeing inside the office buildings concentrations [of asbestos fibers] that are as high as we saw in areas near asbestos plants or where spraying was being done, where there has been illness or death.

The author went on to say that this phenomena "significantly increases the risk" of cancer to people who work in those buildings on a day-in, day-out basis. The newspaper article states the problem is primarily with office buildings constructed since 1958 where asbestos replaced concrete as the fire-retarding wrapping for steel beams.

2. MAG believes the Agency must as soon as possible determine the concentration of asbestos fibers in our office buildings. If the level is unacceptably high, MAG urges rapid action to rectify this serious health hazard.

STATINTL



For the/Management Advisory Group

Asbestos Hazard Found in Offices

By Stuart Abernethy
Washington Post Staff Writer
NEW YORK, Dec. 9—Yale University removed all the ceilings from its 10-story school of art and architecture because the amount of asbestos from them reached levels known to cause cancer deaths.

The University of California at Los Angeles did the same thing in one of its new dormitories because students rooming in their rooms shook loose the cancer-causing asbestos fibers.

The Yale and UCLA ex-

periences are just two examples of what looms as a major occupational health hazard for millions of American office workers, according to a new study by the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine's environmental sciences laboratory here, which found dangerously high levels of asbestos fibers in office buildings around the country.

"We are seeing inside the office buildings concentrations that are as high as we saw in areas near asbestos plants or where spraying was

being done, where there has been illness or death," said Dr. William J. Nicholson, who ran the Mt. Sinai study.

"This significantly increases the risk" of cancer to people who work in those buildings on a day in and day out basis, he added.

Officials at the Environmental Protection Agency, which funded the Mt. Sinai study, said they are concerned over the amount of asbestos found in offices. But they and other health officials expressed apprehension over finding a way to handle the

problem immediately both because it is so pervasive and because it was uncovered so recently.

Compounding the problem is a jurisdictional dispute among federal agencies. EPA scientist Orin Stoppinga said there is a question whether EPA or the Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration has jurisdiction over polluted air in offices. OSHA officials have claimed jurisdiction, but

See ASBESTOS, A13, Col. 1

Asbestos Hazard Seen in New Buildings

ASBESTOS, From A1

have not yet offered solutions for dealing with the asbestos.

The idea of addressing the problem by condemning buildings is not a happy one for New York officials. "I don't know what we can do rapidly," said Dr. Edward Ferrand of the city's Department of Air Resources.

In his study, Nicholson recommended installing improved filters in air circulation systems of buildings to screen out asbestos fibers, but Ferrand said he isn't sure it would work.

OSHA, which appears to have federal jurisdiction, has no regular program of inspecting office buildings.

But OSHA spokesman James Foster said the agency will inspect any building if it receives a complaint. EPA

the large office buildings in the country used various asbestos spray techniques, according to Nicholson.

One method was to spray a mixture of asbestos and water directly on the steel beams. Over time, the asbestos fibers come loose and are circulated through the air conditioning and heating systems.

Nicholson estimated that half the new office buildings in the country and virtually all of the 1,000 buildings put up here between 1958 and 1970 used that method of fireproofing.

His own office here is one of them. Pulling aside a large ceiling panel, he found clumps of asbestos fibers in the crawl-space between floors. "This is the fire-proofing material that didn't stay on," he said.

In New York alone, 700 tons

of asbestos were sprayed in buildings in 1969 and 1970 as fireproofing. Under city law, the spraying stopped here in 1970, and as word of its health hazards to workers spread, contractors halted the method nationwide. Now there is little if any asbestos spraying, but the asbestos remains in the buildings.

The Mt. Sinai study checked asbestos levels in 19 buildings in five cities — New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco and Berkeley, Calif. It found little contamination in buildings where the asbestos was mixed with light cement before it was sprayed.

But four of six buildings in which asbestos was mixed with water proved to have showed levels of asbestos fibers averaging three times

higher than asbestos in the outside air. "It was worse in the newer buildings," said Nicholson.

In addition, the study found that four other buildings, in which asbestos was sprayed for either acoustical or decorative reasons, had abnormally high levels in some rooms.

Asbestos levels are hard to measure and there is no established threshold level between safe and unsafe exposure. "We are finding asbestos disease at lower and lower levels," said Nicholson.

About 7 in 100 asbestos insulation workers die of mesothelioma, a cancer of the lining of the chest and abdomen, in 10,000 times among the general population.

The cancer follows the workers from the job into their homes and neighborhoods.

where the asbestos levels are much lower than the factories. One in three members of families of asbestos workers in Paterson, N.J., showed X-ray signs of exposure to asbestos fibers. About one in 100 of those family members dies of mesothelioma, according to a Mt. Sinai study by Dr. Henry A. Anderson.

Those people being exposed to levels about the same as Nicholson's team found in some office buildings.

Dr. Robert Sawyer, director of health services at Yale, said the highest asbestos levels in the arid architecture building last year.

He found that students and teachers in the building were being exposed to half a fiber per cubic centimeter — not high as industrial exposures go but higher than was found in New Haven, where the college is located.

But maintenance men and janitors were exposed to far higher levels — as much as 50 fibers per cubic centimeter, which is 10 times higher than the level allowed by federal laws for industry.

"Because of that we decided the only real solution was to take the stuff down if we wanted to protect people in the building," said Sawyer.

It was done in 18 days during last Christmas vacation. In all, 92 tons of material from the ceilings was taken out and buried.